"Women to the Rescue!": The Representation of African American Women in the Art and Illustration of African American Harlem Renaissance Publication

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Wright, Roscoe C, "Negro Womanhood." In *The Crisis*, cover. January 1928. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*, by Amy Helene Kirschke, 145. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

Abstract

The "New Negro" was a concept created by Alain Locke, W.E.B Du Bois, and other African American intellectuals during the time of the Harlem Renaissance. This concept promoted the social uplift, greater equality, and the creation of a new identity from within the black community. Fine art and literary works promoted the creation of this new identity. The movement, however, was largely based on the concepts of the "New Negro" being male. This leads one to question, what was the woman's role in the Harlem Renaissance Movement? To what extent was she included? Were efforts made to change her social status and negate her segregation and discrimination? This essay will show that although sexism, racism, and classism are portrayed in her depiction, the "New Negro" female identity was present and promoted. This identity was associated with separate roles in the movement that attempted to conform to white middle class standards of patriarchy; nonetheless those tasks held importance and were celebrated in the African American woman's depiction in art and illustration. Topics that the paper will discuss include two-fold discrimination, efforts to repress that discrimination, women's economic role, education and history, and her beauty and sexuality.

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Introduction

The Harlem Renaissance, historically referred to as "The New Negro Renaissance," was a movement for social uplift during, but not limited to, the 1920s. One of the movement's goals was to provide a positive representation of African Americans through art and literature. This representation was meant to redefine perceptions of African Americans for themselves, as well as the larger American population. Participation of African Americans in the arts, as well as the reworking of popular imagery, was intended to bring about a new acceptance and greater degree of equality. This was done by avoiding stereotypes and representing a more affluent, proud, and positive depiction of people of color.

An example of this can be seen in Aaron Douglas's illustration that served as the cover for the December 1925 issue of *The Opportunity* (Figure 1). The male figure stares directly ahead, without fear or hesitation, looking to the future with hope and strength. He is pictured in Douglas's signature style, which referenced West African tribal masks. The background shows the profile of a city or industrial area surrounded by the outline of a star, referring to the promise that industry held for African Americans at this time. This representation, and others like it, suggests that the "New Negro" is specifically male. The general pronouns, "he" and "him," are used to describe the "New Negro" in publications such as *The Crisis*, *Survey Graphic* and *The New Negro*.[1] This leads one to question, what was the woman's role in the Harlem Renaissance Movement? To what

[1] Emily J. Orlando, "'Feminine Calibans' and "Dark Madonnas of the Grave': The Imaging of Black Women in the New Negro Renaissance," in *New Voices on the Harlem Renaissance: Essays on Race, Gender, and Literary Discourse*, ed. Australia Tarver and Paula C. Barnes (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006); 61.

extent was she included? Were efforts made to change her social status and negate her segregation and discrimination?

An example of a female equivalent to Douglas's male "New Negro" figure can be found in the same artist's "The Burden of Black Womanhood," which was published in September 1927, on the cover of *The Crisis* (Figure 2). Douglas's depiction of this female figure is quite positive, and could be considered as the prototype for "New Negro Woman" herself. This illustration pictures a large woman towering over buildings and pyramids, holding a large circular object. She is pictured with wavy, natural hair, and a slit for an eye, influenced by Ivory Coast masks. The buildings she is towering over represent the pyramids of Egypt, the slave and sharecropping cabins of the South, and the skyscrapers and smoke towers of industry in the North. The circular object she is carrying above her head symbolizes the world and all of its burdens. This piece gives credit to the black women who carried burden and tradition with her throughout the history of the African American community.[2]

Not all representations of African American women were this positive and celebratory. This essay will examine African American women's identity and roles and the complex ways in which these things were represented in the art of the Harlem Renaissance. Topics that will be discussed include, two-fold discrimination, efforts to repress that discrimination, women's economic role, education and history, and her beauty and sexuality. All of these subjects are examined through evidence found in the art and illustration of the Harlem Renaissance period. Much of the artworks that will be

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[2] Amy Helene Kirschke, *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007),143.

discussed are illustrations found in African American intellectual publications of the time. Literature, articles, and essays found in these publications have aided in the interpretation of these artistic representations.

Scholarship on the study of the Harlem Renaissance started with Nathan Irvin Huggin's book *Harlem Renaissa*nce. Completed in 1973, it was the first overall work dedicated to the topic. The work gives a large overview of the movement's contributors and their philosophies regarding the ideals of the larger movement. Art and literature were used as sources. Although important female contributions are mentioned, the larger female experience is generally lacking in this book. As with the movement itself, the concept of the "New Negro" was generally discussed as male.

In more recent years, books such as Cheryl Wall's *Women of the Harlem Renaissance* and Gloria Hull's *Color, Sex, and Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance (Blacks in the Diaspora)* have given insight on the experience of women participating in the Harlem Renaissance. These works, and those like it, mostly discuss the contributions of woman literary artists. These books offer a biographic and feminist approach that argue caste systems based on sex were in place in the Harlem Renaissance and provided large obstacles to women artists.

Other scholarship has covered the representation of African Americans in art at this time. The topic of women's representation in African American journal illustration however, has not been fully discussed. It is the authors hope to provide an overview of the larger female population's experience in the time of the Harlem Renaissance, based on their depictions in art and illustration. It is the author's hope not to essentialize, but

give a broad overview of the obstacles and opportunities that many women of color faced at this time.

The Harlem Renaissance goal was to achieve greater equality for African Americans in white America. To do this African American's often succumbed to white middle class standards. These standards often involved notions of gender roles based on white patriarchy, which placed men in a dominant roles. To achieve equality equivalent to whites, black journals portrayed women of color in roles appropriate to women. Women who were supporters of the "New Negro Movement" would also have to subscribe to these standards in order to support their cause. Their special experiences however, made it difficult for most African American women to limit themselves to only wife and motherhood. Due to black women's often need to work outside of the home due to discriminatory practices in the male work force, difficulties arose in this assimilation to white norms. Response to this was not negative but often celebratory in the illustrations of black journals. Women made efforts to maintain femininity despite her unique experiences. She was celebrated in art for her economic independence, beauty, efforts for equality, motherhood, and contribution to history and memory. This paper will show the efforts that African American intellectual journals of the Harlem Renaissance made to depict black women as worthy of respect based not only upon their assimilation to white middle class standards, but also their experiences and responsibilities that made them uniquely important to the African American community.

Background: Harlem Renaissance, its Publications and Efforts

Aaron Douglas's *Aspects of Negro Life: Song of Towers*, from 1934, gives a visual representation of the African American experience during, and leading up to, the period known as the Harlem Renaissance (Figure 3). Due to the need for labor in industry during World War I, African Americans moved from rural areas in the South to industrial centers in the North. This was thought of as an escape from sharecropping, which had existed in the South since Reconstruction, often mimicking the oppressive conditions of slavery. This "escape" can be seen in the right hand corner of the Douglas piece, as a figure flees from the clutches of a foreboding hand. The figure carries a suitcase up a gear, representative of the mechanical nature of factory work, to a bright hopeful environment of skyscrapers and the Statue of Liberty. The Statue references not only hope, but also the location of New York, the hub of the African American cultural and intellectual world at the time. [3]

The focal point of the painting, a figure with a horn in hand, is the key to the understanding of the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance happened in response to the new opportunities in social mobility available to African Americans at the time. With entrance into the industrial economy came a greater chance for equality and middle class status. Equality and social uplift were promoted through art, as was shown by the presence of the musical instrument in the Douglas painting. Art and literature,

[3] Amy Helene Kirschke, "The Depression Murals of Aaron Douglas: Radical Politics and African American Art," *The International Review of African American Art* 12, 4 (1995); 27.

made it possible to express oneself and create and promote a new, positive African American identity.

Art coming out of the Harlem Renaissance movement was largely used in a propagandistic way. Publications such as, *The Crisis*, *The Survey Graphic*, and *The New Negro*, used art to change public perception and perceptions within the African American community. This meant the ousting of stereotypes and inclusion of depictions of African Americans in a positive light, contributing to the greater American community. It included images of assimilation and used the strategy of linking white classes to black classes through similar dress and appearance of the subjects. This included depictions of black men with similar gender roles to white men and black women with similar gender roles to white women. This art displayed the talents of the African American community at this time. This ability to make high art was used as an argument for equality; by participating in high art and its cannons, African Americans were proving their intellectual worth as equal to that of whites.[4]

The Crisis was an African American intellectual journal, created in 1910 by W.E.B Du Bois and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Its purpose was to document important issues in the black community and interracial relations. Another primary goal of the newspaper was to reclaim African American history and identity from the racist white American norm. It sought to accomplish this goal not only with the written word, but also with images. Du Bois called for the use of imagery relating to rural workers, industrial workers, women, and children to promote a

[4] Anne Elizabeth Carroll, *Word, Images, and The New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 94, 101.

sense of common identity within the black community.[5] Visuals drew the reader to the literature of the journal, but also made important statements themselves; these statements were made by excluding visual stereotype and promoting images of positive and dignified aspects of African American life, which worked to affirm a new identity.

The Crisis and journals like it provided an outlet for black artists that was free from white patronage. During the Harlem Renaissance, all things "black" were in particular vogue for the white "modernist" community, which was rebelling against conservative and realist notions. For inspiration they looked to the art of Africa, which was considered primitive and untainted by the western cannons. African American's were considered inherently able to make art that was linked to African primitivism and was therefore sought after. African American often made this art to supply this demand. Black publications gave artists and writers the opportunity to escape these limitations and create work that promoted social uplift and a positive historical memory and identity.[6]

Art that filled this demand often depicted black women as a seductive and hyper-sexed beings, similar to that of the stereotypical "Jezebel" figure that was used to justify white sexual violence toward black women. Stereotypical imagery, such as the "Jezebel," was used to depict African Americans to the white public in advertisement and entertainment. Stereotypes often emasculated black men. The "Sambo" caricature was often used to depict African American men as docile, lazy, happy, and simple beings (Figure 4). This caricature was previously used to defend slavery and similarly used to justify segregation and discrimination. Other stereotypes that defended the inequality of black men were

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[5] Amy Helene Kirschke, *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 167-220.
[6] Kirschke, *Art in Crisis*, 14.

their depiction as "brutes," or uncontrollable and violent individuals eager to attack white female purity. These black men were not only "controlled" by white law, but also their domineering wives and mothers. Stereotypes of this kind are often titled "Mammy," or "Sassy Mammy" (Figures 5, 6). "Mammies" where depicted as asexual, docile, and loyal caregivers to white families. In their own households however, they were domineering controllers of their husbands and children. These stereotypes perpetuated opposite gender relations to what was the white standard at this time. Women were strong and men were weak. To achieve equality in the "New Negro Movement" patriarchal white standards of gender hierarchy were enforced. In this way the stereotypes created by the "Sambo" and "Mammy" caricatures were denounced, but black women would loose previous gender equalities within her community.[7]

Another well-known publication of the Harlem Renaissance was an issue of the *Survey Graphic*, a magazine devoted to the study of groups of people. Previous issues had been released covering issues of the Irish, Mexican, and Russian communities, which had experienced similar "renaissances" or social movements for change.[8] The responsibility of editorship for the specific issue entitled, *Harlem, Mecca of the New Negro*, was placed in the hands of African Americans, under the leadership of Alain Locke, a Harvard-educated intellectual. According to Anne Elizabeth Carroll, author of *Word, Image and The New Negro*, the creation of this issue and The New Negro Movement was to eliminate negative stereotype of African Americans, commonly found in the white American culture of the time. Some however, found it too much like a study

[7] Marlon Riggs, "Ethnic Notions Transcript," California Newsreel, http://newsreel.org/transcripts/ethnicno.htm (accessed May 10, 2011).
[8] Carroll, 172.

of an exotic "other" people, who presumably needed to be analyzed in order to identify their specific problems. Elise J. McDougald, a contributor to the issue, said of African American women's representation, that all are, "a colorful pageant of individuals, each differently endowed" and that "their problems can not be thought of in mass."[9] Other critics argued that one issue of a magazine could not explain an identity of an entire group of people, no matter how many sources and points of view it showed.

Many scholars have recognized problems in the work, including classism and sexism. This tends to correspond with the movement as a whole. The Du Bois notion of the "talented tenth," assumed that through the leadership of the brightest and elite members of the African American community, a new identity and high culture would develop and lead to greater racial equality for the whole of the race. In the *Survey Graphic* this elitist attitude comes through. Depictions of the working class are shown, but are discussed by elite writers and artists; their own voice is not heard. This leads one to believe that the *Survey Graphic* was a venue to transcend racial boundaries between higher classes, and less to create a common identity within the black community.[10]

Sexist attitudes are also prevalent. Only four out of twenty-six contributors to the *Survey Graphic* were women. The illustrations included often-depicted women, but only one is labeled with her name, while ten men are given this privilege. Elise J. McDougald, the only female contributor to the issue, is the author of the essay, "The Task of Negro Womanhood." This was the only work focusing on women's experience in the issue. Masculine pronouns are used through out the *Survey Graph*ic to discuss the whole of the

[9] Elise Johnson McDougald, "The Task of Negro Womanhood," in *The New Negro: an Interpretation*, ed. Alain Locke (1925; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1968), 369.
[10] Kirschke, *Art in Crisis*, 5; Carroll, 130-31.

African American population, or perhaps to indicate that African American men were dominant in the "New Negro" philosophy.[11]

The success of the *Survey Graphic* issue led to the publication of *The New Negro*. This publication included the content of the *Survey Graphic* issue, but also added more. This extended work's goal was to create a unifying African American identity, rather than be an effort for interracial relations. It wished to embrace the differences in the community, and allowed for suggestions for further study, with the inclusion of an extensive bibliography. Despite its efforts to portray a bigger picture, it still enforced the ideas of elitism and sexism that the previous work had.[12]

The New Negro, as a title, seemed to say that the concept of identity for an entire group of people will be easily summed up and answered in this one publication. First impressions led the reader to the illustrations, printed on glossy paper. Illustrations in *The New Negro* include some from the *Survey Graphic*, but excluded much of its common folk representations. New illustrations came from Winold Reiss as well as Aaron Douglas, Reiss's student and an immerging artist of time. The images focused mostly on the elite, intellectual thinkers of the day. The African influenced works by Douglas connected African Americans to their African heritage. This was a trend at the time.[13] Reiss's works were very similar to the ones in the *Survey Graphic*. He contributed more portraits of specific individuals, mostly men, and one woman. In this publication, ten men were represented with name and portrait, as opposed to only two women. The book contains a few more contributions by women, with the ratio now being

[11] Carroll, 154.
[12] Ibid, 158.
[13] Ibid, 163.

seven women to twenty-nine men. These ratios implied men's writing and opinion were more important and therefore dominant in the "New Negro" philosophy. McDougald's essay continued to be the only essay about the experiences of African American women and the whole of the publication reaffirmed the African American identity as specifically masculine.[14]

[14] Carroll, 187.

African American Women's Two-Fold Discrimination

> I have always felt like bowing myself before them in all abasement, searching to bring some tribute to these long suffering victims, theses burdened sisters of mine, whom the world, the wise, white world, loves to affront and ridicule and wantonly to insult.[15]
>
> -W.E.B. Du Bois

"The Damnation of Women" was an essay written by Du Bois, and published in his collection of essays entitled *Darkwater* in 1920. The essay discussed black women's profoundly unique experience in America. Du Bois was an advocate for women's rights and women's issues were also often discussed in *The Crisis* in a section entitled, "Talks About Women." In both of these works Du Bois discussed the burdens of black womanhood and women's struggle for equality as directly next in order to the problems of the color line. He understood that women's experiences were different from that of men's. These experiences were also profoundly different from the experiences of white women. Black women experienced all the discrimination of a black man, but were required to react to it in a way suited for a woman of the time, in order to avoid criticisms of her femininity**.**

These criticisms were the result of Victorian female social norms of respect, modesty, and chastity never being given to black women. Even after slavery, the common courtesies allotted to women were withheld. Du Bois did realize this, but did not suggest that the Victorian standards of womanhood should be completely put upon women of color. He recognized that through all of her hardships, African American women had become economically self sufficient in many cases. Du Bois said, "We cannot abolish

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[15] W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Damnation of Women," in *The Seventh Son: The Thought and Writings of W.E.B. Du Bois, Volume I*, ed. Julius Lester (New York: Random House, 1971), 526.

the new economic freedom of women. We cannot imprison women again in a home or require them all on pain of death to be nurses and housekeepers."[16] He spoke of the need for women to be economically independent, as there were as many as one in seven families with a woman being a sole care and financial provider in the African American and foreign born communities. [17] He also stated that the African American male breadwinner's wages were below the standard, and women's work often subsidized the family's financial needs.

"The Task of Negro Womanhood" was an essay included in the publication of the *Survey Graphic* and *The New Negro*. It was written by Elise Johnson McDougald, who was a well-accomplished African American woman with expertise in teaching and writing. She held positions as a social investigator, vocational guidance expert, and a public school vice-principal. She was a leader of many women's clubs, including the Women's Trade Union League and Y.W.C.A.[18] She expressed similar concerns as Du Bois when discussing the plight of black women in her essay. McDougald said, "What is left of chivalry is not directed toward her;" meaning that the treatment normally allotted to women was not given to women of color. [19]

Marita Bonner, an early 20th century African American author, had similar concerns in her autobiographical essay "On Being Young – a Woman – and Colored." She described a feeling of connection between white and black women, saying that both of them were faced with the inability for mobility without permission of men, or the company of men.

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[16] Dubois, 523.
[17] Ibid, 522.
[18] Alain Locke ed., *The New Negro: an Interpretation* (1925; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1968), 419.
[19] McDougald, 369.

She went on to discuss discrimination based on race, and advised women how to deal with her treatment. Despite the obstacles that she faced, Bonner pleaded for women to "not grow bitter…. you know that you cannot live with a chip on your shoulder even if you can manage a smile around your eyes – without getting steely and brittle and losing the softness that makes you a woman." African American women were expected to handle their discrimination with grace. Bonner said, "Being a woman, you have to go about it gently and quietly, to find out and to discover just what is wrong. Just what can be done," if anything; "being a woman – you can wait." Bonner suggested here that women's fight against discrimination had to fit into the roles of womanhood. [20]

The social standard of women's roles was assumed to fit her presumably biological disposition as a nurturing, loving, and a civilizing force. This enforcement of gender roles that promoted the middle class standard of patriarchal dominance also led to the affirming of black manhood as the primarily authoritative figure in the community. Stereotypes and racism often flipped these gender roles in the white perception of the black community. It was assumed that black women were the domineering force in the black household and community, which denounced African American manhood. By reasserting gender roles based on male dominance black men were asserting their manhood and linking themselves to a socially acceptable white standard. If women were to promote this standard they were to stay in roles believed to be suitable for them. This limited blatantly vocal and aggressive disagreement about her discrimination.

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[20] Marita Bonner, "On Being Young – a Woman – and Colored." in *Frye Street & Environs: The Collected Works of Marita Bonner,* ed. Joyce Flynn and Joyce Occomy Stricklin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987): 3,5,6,6,7.

This presumably biological difference in women is reflected in Du Bois writing about children. Du Bois rejected the idea that men were superior to women, but he also subscribed to the idea of women's inherent civilizing temperament.

> On the other hand there are certain distinct advantages in girls. They contribute to the home, in the first ten or fifteen fateful years, far more than boys. They become the intimate and loving part of its organism, its work and play and decoration. They are educated and trained in the home by parents and chosen guests, while the boy, despite every effort, gets his chief training on the streets and even in the gutter. The girl stays tame while the boy wanders wild and even in the re-creation of life; it is the mother not the father who counts most in all ancient civilizations….[21]

Here, woman's worth is in her disposition to contribute to the family as a loving nurturer, as would be a white woman's. Nothing is said of her potential to contribute the greater community as a whole. She is assumed to be tame and loving.

Earlier in the century efforts were made to fix black women into white Victorian standards of femininity. According to scholar Martha H. Patterson, the first to pen the term, "New Negro Woman" was Margaret Murray Washington in her essay of the same name, published in 1895. Washington, the wife of Booker T. Washington, and an accomplished contributor to the race discussion in her own right, was committed to the idea that African American women should strive for middle class status and ideals, including, "home maintenance, etiquette, and a particular kind of dress."[22] This was a much stricter assimilation than what Du Bois would later call for, but attempts were made to show women in respectable and upstanding positions specifically fit for them. This can be seen in seen in Archibald J. Motley Jr,'s "The Octoroon Girl" from 1925 (Figure 7). Here a woman is pictured as an affluent, upstanding member of the elite community.

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[21] Irene Diggs, "Du Bois and Children," *Phylon* 37 (4th Quarter 1976): 386-387.
[22] Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 50.

She wears clothing suited to that of a middle class woman of her time. Through this she shows her conformity to American female standards.

The individual promotion of the image of middle class status was more important than the actual high status itself. If an empowered image was presented, it would be reflected in the larger community. Therefore, perceptions of that community would improve. This emphasis on image greatly promoted the women's role as a consumer. Through the act of buying, women were showing their commitment to assimilation and the American Dream of accomplishing middle class status.[23] Washington called for women to establish themselves more firmly in the home. This would align her roles more equally with those of white middle class women and therefore provide them a more equal status.

Winold Reiss's drawings in the *Survey Graphic* and The New Negro contribute to this notion of equality through Americanization. Elitism and sexism are also evident. Reiss was a Bavarian artist who had contributed to other issues of the *Survey Graphic* and its need for "type" drawings. His interest was in "folk," or common people. This included art and depictions of the people themselves. He had previously done similar studies of Native Americans, Mexicans, and Scandinavian peoples.[24] His work in this issue of the *Survey Graphic* identified a "type" of individual one might see in Harlem; presumably representing a slew of like peoples there. These "types" have no names, and are only identified by their place of origin or profession. There is no discussion of these people as individuals, but instead Reiss shows what kind of persons they represent.[25] A majority of these "Harlem Types" are female, with one androgynous character, a boy, and one man.

[23] Patterson, 10, 23.
[24] Locke, 419.
[25] Carroll, 128.

The reason for this may have been the need to appeal to a white audience. The majority of female characters to a white audience would be perceived as less threatening. Women were often considered more physically and intellectually weak, and therefore easier to accept.

The androgynous figure is first in the series, and is labeled "Congo" (Figure 8). The image and title of the work fail to give any identity to gender, implying that identification of gender was less important to the African and "uncivilized" members of the community. The androgyny also references the historic and ironic equality of female slaves to their male counterparts, as expectations were largely the same for both genders. The figure identified as a man is the last image in the series and is identified as "A College Lad" (Figure 9). He is dressed in a three-piece suit, the popular attire for elite men of the day. This drawing implies the figure's high status and the possibility of his future contributions through his education. This man defies the stereotype that the mischievous black oaf and invites white readership into new perceptions of African Americans. The placement of "Congo" first, and "A College Lad" last, gives indication to the "progress," that at least some African Americans had made in becoming assimilated to American cultural goals. This Assimilation would make them more deserving of American freedoms and equalities.[26]

The boy represented, is labeled "A Boy Scout," giving validity to his ability to become homogenized in American traditions. The rest of the images are female. The girl shown is labeled, "Young American: native born," and also specifically identifying her as an official member of the American community. "Mother and Child" celebrated African

[26] Carroll, 143.

American motherhood, which was often criticized in popular culture as being inadequate; this point will be discussed later in this paper.

This Assimilation through achieving middle class status caused a dilemma. Women of color were largely detached from the ability to achieve middle class status. African American men's wages were far less than the standard white man's wages. This made a higher status nearly impossible without the added contribution of women's work outside the home. In 1920, forty-out-of-one-hundred black women were employed outside of the home; six-out-of-one-hundred white women were employed.[27] This in turn, would negate the middle class standard of the "new woman's" roles as a housewife, which largely placed women in the domestic sphere.

Black women's experience in discrimination was not only linked to the color of her skin, but also to her gender. As part of the strategy to show white America that African Americans had assimilated to white standards, and therefore worthy of equality in that society, black women sacrificed some of their own previously held equalities to men. White middle class standards of patriarchy were put upon them despite their difficulty to succumb to them. The role as a social housekeeper for the maintaining of the moral status of society was pressed upon black women, as this was thought to be a positive biological quality of women, and an appropriate outlet for her contribution to the movement.

[27] Carroll, 8.

Elitism in Women's Mode of Social Reform

Scholars and race leaders of the day promoted women's assumed value as a civilizing force. Most called for women to take an active, although specific role in their liberation from racial and sexual discriminations. Amy Jacques Garvey, a race leader and wife of Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey, wrote an article on the roles of the "New Negro" woman. She suggested that women, "work on a par with men in the office and the platform; Practice thrift and economy; Teach constructive race doctrine to children; demand absolute respect of the race from all men; teach the young to love race first."[28] The promotion of these ideals leads one to believe that some of the concepts of the "new woman" from the late 19th and early 20th century were brought through into the 1920s decade. Activism by women at this time was performed mostly through clubs and organizations. Black women maintained their devotion to social reform and progressivism through their work as clubwomen. This kind of activism was thought acceptable for women of the day as it reflected women's maternal and civilizing values necessary for social housekeeping.

Elise McDougald, a race leader and educator, suggested that despite all of their hardships, women of color, especially those living in industrial centers, did have some opportunities. These included encouragement to work for the cause of race through clubs and organizations. She claimed that women of color were more equal to men of color, than white women were to white men.[29] She suggested that the community of Harlem offered a woman more freedom and opportunity than she would have elsewhere.

[28] Orlando, 89.
[29] McDougald, 380.

Despite the inability of many African American women to enter middle class status, several women still participated in activities for social reform. Women joined organizations and clubs to achieve goals for greater equality between races and genders. Alliances between African American and white were hard to come by, regardless of the two groups similar motive of equality. Organizations to which whites belonged were often not open to African American women. The National American Woman Suffrage Association, a major force in the passing of the Nineteenth Amendment, barred African American women from joining. Black women's groups were formed to counter act this bigotry. One of these groups was the National Association of Colored Women. Women of color often experienced less opposition from males of their community in their work for gender equality. This was often because women's groups also worked for the enfranchisement and equality based on race.[30]

The cover of *The Crisis* in August 1915 is entitled, "Votes For Women." It represents the "New Negro" Movement's support for women's work in suffrage (Figure 12).. This issue was one of the two issues of *The Crisis* focusing on women's suffrage. It pictures Abraham Lincoln, often known as the great emancipator, standing over Sojourner Truth, a great race leader and advocate for women's rights. Truth and Lincoln both motion to a book, perhaps symbolizing the importance of education and literacy for all people. Here Lincoln symbolically looks over women and African American people as an advocate for their equality.[31]

Women's work in clubs and organizations however, was not without problems. Du Bois's "talented tenth" philosophy lead to elitism in the movement and between women.

[30] Patterson, 5.
[31] Kirschke, *Art in Crisis*, 212.

Representations of middle class, potentially clubwomen, were promoted (Figure 7). As many women were not able to succumb to this standard of consuming and buying clothing, due to poverty, further stigmas would be perpetuated. Frequently, the tasks of clubwomen were to educate women of lower status who presumably held popular stereotypes. These stereotypical characteristics included a lack of Christian and maternal virtues and over-sexualized behavior, which showed lack of self-control.[32] This image was often perpetuated in the caricature of the "Jezebel."

The other two figures in Reiss's "Harlem Types" included, "Girl in the white blouse" and "A woman lawyer" (Figure 10,11). It is interesting that these figures are placed next to each other as they could have been understood as on opposite sides of the social status spectrum. The "Girl in the white blouse" is only identified by her clothing, and the fact that it is a girl although it seems safe to say she would be classified as a woman. Her posture, downward gaze, dress, and hair, seem to be more casual than that of the rest of the American "types." She is therefore perceived, as the figure with the least status, excluding perhaps "Congo." The portrait of the person directly next to "Girl in the white blouse" could be perceived as the figure with the most status. "A woman lawyer," is not as large as "A college lad," and is placed in the middle of the series with three other drawings on its page. This is odd, as the figure has completed the education that "A college lad" is pursuing. She has succeeded in obtaining a position of high status through her profession. She is looking directly out at the viewer confronting them and confirming her assertiveness. Although this lawyer holds the highest station of all the figures in the group, she is not the last figure, representing full assimilation. This is because of the

[32] Carroll, 60.

restrictions applied to her gender, based on white standards. She is a woman, so her equality would be seen as similar to white women, who were inferior to white men; the same would be true with black women being inferior to black men. Her placement next to "Girl in the white blouse" also could indicate her responsibility to the other women of her race. Because of her high status, and membership in the "talented tenth" of her race, her responsibility is to lead and uplift those less fortunate to similar positions. Here, her value is greater, than her less educated counterpart.

Women's activism was limited to avenues that were considered socially acceptable for them based upon their assumed inherent civilizing force. Club work was often the socially acceptable means for white and black women to achieve social change. Regardless of similar goals of equality based on gender, black women were often victims of racism in the Women's Suffrage Movement. For this reason, and African American women's work toward equality based upon race, their own clubs were formed. Within these clubs tension of elitisms still arose with women of higher status' "talented tenth" responsibility to lower classes of women.

African American Women and Their Professions

A later series in the *Survey Graphic*, and later in The New Negro, had an even greater focus on African American women. This series was titled, "Four Portraits of Negro Women." The series starts with a drawing entitled "Woman from the Virgin Islands" and progresses to "The Librarian," then to "Two Public School Teachers," and finally to the first illustration of a female who has been named in the publication, "Elise Johnson McDougald" (Figures 13,14,15,16). An essay, "The Task of Negro Womanhood" by Elise J. McDougald, illuminates this series. The essay gives clarity to these representations of women and the status of women of color at this time. McDougald discussed four groups of women in her essay; these included, a very small elite leisure group, the progressive business and professional class, those in trades and industry, and finally those in domestic service. She calls attention to African American women's low pay, discrimination, and sexual inequality. She gives credit to the women's organizations that work to combat these inequalities.

McDougald explained the effects of African American women's discrimination on her economic situation. This was not only because of discrimination toward women, but the discrimination toward African American men. Because of men's discrimination in the work force that often resulted in low wages, African American women were more apt to work than white women in order to subsidize her family's income.[33]

The first group of women discussed is the elite. McDougald claimed that the black elite had much in common with the white elite. Women in this group were picked by men for their beauty and had the problems of a wife and mother. Issues of race did not

[33] McDougald, 370.

affect them greatly as they often fit into the white patriarchal standard of a nuclear family. She showed a bit of a stigma towards these women, as she explained their biggest problem was the inability to acquire proper help around the house. African American women in domestic service were less apt to work in their own neighborhoods for fear of being seen by acquaintances, as well as having the assumption that African American households would not pay as much as whites would. She noted the elite woman's ability to better herself intellectually by education and travel. She also gave credit to some of these women for their work in clubs and organizations for the social betterment of the entire community.[34]

The second class of women McDougald discussed were those in professional work and trades. Women were given few opportunities in professional careers, but examples of women are given who, when given the chance, did excel in higher positions. Credit is given to social workers, probation officers, investigators, policewomen, legal advocates for children, as well as the three hundred African American female nurses and three hundred African American female teachers in New York City alone. She praised women for their work with relief organizations, missions, and churches; all of these professions and activities fitting into the restricting standards of femininity described above.

People in these professions often depended on African Americans for business, as white patrons and businesses would not hire people of color. Professional women often had to depend on people of their own race for work in professional settings such as, legal, dental, and medical work. These people on whom they depended were underpaid in there

[34] McDougald, 371.

own right, and therefore African American professionals made less than their white counterparts. [35]

Most of "Portraits of Negro Women" represent the professional group of women. The prominent imaging of these women shows evidence of the "New Negro" Movement's efforts to change the perception of African Americans by largely showing those in the higher classes. These characters of higher status include "Two Public School Teachers," who are shown wearing Phi Beta Kappa keys, indicating their experience in higher education, and "The Librarian," who is dressed in a fur coat indicating her status by her ability to purchase expensive clothing (Figure 15,14).[36] Others include "Elise J. McDougald" and "Mary McLoed Bethune;" their high status was indicated by the labeling of their portraits with their specific names, a privilege only given these two women represented in *The New Negro*. All of the men in this publication were given this privilege.

When writing of women in industry, McDougald discussed their difficulty in entering into the factories. Custom had set black women against industrial workers as scabs, or workers sent in to break strikes. Efforts were made to remedy this with women organization's efforts to establish solidarity with labor unions. McDougald noted African American women's long tradition in the industries of cookery, dressmaking, helping, and finishing, but also noted that it was rare that women would be given the opportunity to work their way into managerial positions within these fields.[37]

[35] McDougald, 373-74.
[36] Carroll, 169.
[37] McDougald, 377.

The last group of women McDougald discussed were those in domestic and casual work. A few remnants of a non-elite are recognized in the illustrations of the *Survey Graphic* and New Negro. "Woman from the Virgin Islands" and "Girl with the white blouse" are the only figures representing women of presumably lower class (Figure 13, 10). No illustrations of men fit into this category. Many women were over-educated and over qualified for domestic work, such as housekeeping, but lacked the opportunities for placement in higher fields. Women were also excluded from entrepreneurial opportunities because of here inability to obtain capital and credit.[38] This lack of opportunity forced them to take work as domestics. McDougald explained the hardships that women working in these positions faced.

> Happiness is almost impossible under the strain of these conditions. Health and morale suffer, but how else can her children, loose all afternoon, be gathered together at nightfall? Through it all she manages to give satisfactory service and the Negro woman is sought after for the unpopular work, largely because her honesty, loyalty and cleanliness have stood the test of time. Through her drudgery, the women of other groups find leisure time for progress. This is one of her contributions to America.[39]

Here African American women are given credit for their sacrifice, not only to women of their race, but also white women. Elite women were given the opportunity of intellectual progress due to their domestic workers efforts. It is stated that this contribution leads to the betterment of the entire nation.

There is an irony in this statement, however as McDougald evokes a stereotype of the "Mammy," or Aunt Jemima, as loyal and honest, which she had earlier condemned in her essay (Figure 4). She claimed that, "the grotesque Aunt Jemimas of the streetcar

[38] McDougald, 378.
[39] Ibid, 379.

advertisements, proclaim the ability to serve with out grace of loveliness."[40] Although this statement attacks mostly the appearance of a "Mammy" figure, the general idea is explained as "grotesque" and therefore ridiculous in general. It is interesting, then that McDougald would bring up the "Mammy's" traits in order to praise the sacrifice of an entire economic group of individuals. African American women, working as domestics servants sacrifice is perhaps in conforming to the stereotype for the love of her children and greater community.

McDougald explained the professions of African American women at the time of the Harlem Renaissance. Elite women were the only group that was really able to adhere to white middle class standards. As a result of this, they were those who experience greater equality and respect in the eyes of white Americans. Professional and industrial work was often limited to women of color due to discrimination and lack of opportunity. Women therefore often had to resort to domestic work. Although McDougald stresses the lack of opportunity available to women, she celebrates their sacrifice, and the benefits that it provided for other women's betterment, both white and black.

[40] McDougald, 370.

Motherhood: "Women to the Rescue!"

African American women's love for their children and devotion to their community are profoundly represented by their role as mothers. In her essay, "The Task of Negro Womanhood," Elise J. McDougald commented on women of color's representation in art. She said, "beauty, built up in the fine arts, have excluded her (women of color) almost entirely" and she is often used to "portray feminine viciousness or vulgarity." She later attacked this attitude while discussing African American motherhood; "the artist's imagination will find a more inspiring subject in the modern Negro mother," she wrote.[41]

McDougald confronted ugly stereotypes of women of color as morally indecent and maternally incompetent by discussing the exceedingly difficult issue of rape and prostitution, and their result. She explained that these were problems for women of all races. She stated that the issue was not in that of race, but one of class. She denounced the commonly held idea that minority women had lower sexual standards by calling on connections to African tribal traditions of strict codes for sexual relations. Here she defended not only African American women's sexuality but African women's as well. This is often lost in other writings and representations of this time, and will be discussed later.

McDougald referenced the historical tradition of slave masters' sexual abuses of their female slaves. She makes evident the illegitimacy, shame, and grief that was a result of that abuse, and the fact that it was a continuing issue. Sexual abuse did not stop with slavery. W.E.B. Dubois also felt that women's sexual abuse was an issue that demanded attention. He discussed one of his experiences in a "Jim Crow" car, when

[41] McDougald, 372.

conductor of the train, described as being old and white, made advances at a 16-year-old girl.

> The girl said that the man came to her uninvited and asked her if she has a sweetheart. She said he was a white man and she thought she had to answer him, and so told him "No." Then he said, "I'll be your sweetheart," and sat down and tried to hug her. She said she turned her head toward the window and cried to him to stop. "But," she said, "he was so much stronger than I that I could not keep him off.[42]

The girl's screams woke Du Bois from a nap and he was able to intervene. Little could be done to prosecute the conductor besides Du Bois writing a letter to the train company and publishing his experience in *The Crisis*.

To defend the victims, who often become unwed mothers as a result of sexual abuse, McDouglad said, "When economic, social and biological forces combined bring about unwed motherhood, the reaction is much the same as in families in other racial groups. Secrecy is maintained if possible."[43] The condemnation of unwed motherhood was prevalent at this time. Because of this stigma women were made to make the ultimate sacrifice. The child of an unwed mother would often be given to an aunt or grandmother to be raised as her own.

Du Bois similarly discussed the issue of motherhood in his essay, "The Damnation of Women." "The damnation of women," was in fact the sacrifice of intelligence and self-betterment for motherhood. He recognized the irony of the celebration of virginity and motherhood, while both were also condemned in many circumstances. Women who chose to pursue education and professional work, but not marriage and motherhood, were demonized as too independent. The mother who did not find herself in a nuclear family

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[42] Irene Diggs, "Du Bois and Children," *Phylon* 37 (4th Quarter 1976): 383.
[43] McDougald, 380.

situation was also condemned. Du Bois called for the right of motherhood at a woman's own discretion and also the continued honoring of the mother who has been abandoned by the father of her children. By doing this he defied middle class standards that accepted nuclear families as the only appropriate place for women. McDougald also praised the efforts and sacrifices of widowed and abandoned women who were forced to work as well as raise their children alone and against the odds.[44]

Du Bois glorified black motherhood by calling upon Africa as a motherland for all people, not only people of color, but Caucasians as well. Du Bois employed the philosophy of an African village leader when he said, "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."[45] He believed that the influence of the mother on a child had often been more important than that of the father. He believed the black family was the backbone of the black community, and women had the primary role of care giving in the family. Women were often celebrated in their role as mothers in the pages of *The Crisis*. In the political cartoon, "Women to the Rescue!" by John Henry Adams, a woman stands in front of her children, protecting them from birds labeled "segregation," "Jim Crow Law," and "Grandfather Clause" (Figure 17). Her weapon is labeled, "Federal Constitution." A man runs from the scene stating that he must "stay in my place," leaving the woman to bare the burden of protection by herself. This image makes clear the incredible effort of African American mothers who were often left to care for their children without a partner's help or support.[46]

[44] Du Bois, 512, 525; McDougald, 373.
[45] Du Bois, 514.
[46] Kirschke, *Art in Crisis*, 215-216.

The celebration of black motherhood defies stereotypes of immorality. By showing women as virtuous mothers, notions of irresponsibility and deviance are replaced with notions of wholesomeness and family values. This was often achieved through images of virtuosity and religion. African Americans had had a long tradition of Christianity since slavery. Women were largely responsible for the creation and maintenance of the church. Celebration of motherhood and religion were linked in the representations of the Holy Family. In Zell Ingram's "A Flight into Egypt," the Holy Family is pictured as black, and escaping from Herod, after the birth of Christ, to Egypt. This referenced the African American escape from oppression (Figure 18). Connecting oneself to the holy family through skin color would promote a positive connection to the Christian religion, which would also provide for the creation of a positive identity. Connection to Mary, the mother of god, and the most important woman in the Christian religion, would be specifically positive for women of color.

"The Black Madonna" by Winold Reiss also shows this connection (Figure 19). She is the first image that the reader is confronted with in The New Negro. She is dressed in blue and obviously references the biblical Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, celebrating African American motherhood, beauty, purity, and virtue. This modern woman's responsibility to her child is as his teacher and guide in his journey to great things. This references the idea of "Republican Motherhood," the idea made popular in early America that credited the importance of women's education to their ability to educate their children, specifically their sons. This secular idea allowed women the ability to become educated, but also lent itself to the societal standard that women's place was in the caring

and nurturing of children in the home. In this case, the education of women was not to better her, but to educate the future generation of males for the promise of great things.[47]

Women were celebrated for their maternal efforts. Although the standard black family often did not match the standard white family, race leaders advocated for mothers who worked, and mothers of single parent families. They were celebrated for their efforts through illustration. Images of religion and spirituality were also used to glorify women of color's maternal worth by associating them with Mary the mother of Christ.

[47] Martha Jane Nadell, *Enter the New Negroes: Images of Race in American Culture,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), 65, and Carroll,182,183, 187.

Education and "Her"story

The "New Negro" Movement's emphasis on education did not stop with "Republication Motherhood" and the education of children. Women were often credited for their educational contribution to the larger community. Of these accreditations, work as teachers and librarians were the most prominent. Of teachers McDougald said,

> Though her salary in most places lags behind the service she is rendering, her inspiration is the belief that the hope of the race is in the New Negro student. Of more vital import that what he is compelled to be to-day, is what he is determined to make of himself tomorrow. And, the Negro woman teacher, bringing to the class room sympathy and judgment, is a mighty force in this battle.[48]

Although women were in the public sphere here, they were still placed within a nurturing role. Again, women's intelligence and self-betterment was not what was found important, but what its effect on future generations, particularly those of men. This enforced white standards of patriarchy.

Despite this, promotion of education for women was great. Du Bois and *The Crisis* supported and encouraged the education of all individuals, regardless of their gender. An untitled drawing pictured in the July 1912 issue of *The Crisis* shows a male and a female graduate looking ahead with hope (Figure 20). There is no indication of what they have studied, or if it had been decided by their gender. Based on their educational background they are on equal footing to succeed.

Du Bois did not specify what women should become educated in, but he did state that they should not be limited to professions thought to be uniquely feminine, such as housekeeping. Lorenzo Harris's political cartoon, "The New Education in the South: Domestic Science for Colored Girls Only," published in *The Crisis* in 1913, warns of the

[48] McDougald, 376.

limited education that African American women received (Figure 21). One can see the efforts of Southern whites, shown by a particularly Southern-looking man, grabbing the arm of a black domestic worker, symbolizing attempts to keep black women in positions of servitude. The cartoon calls for women to escape this fate by seeking an education.[49]

Although women's freedom of academic choice was called for, many women were led into careers considered suitable for them. One of these careers was that of a librarian, and can be seen in "A Librarian," from "Portraits of Negro Women" (Figure 14). Professions in history were normally not allotted to women at this time and those in library science were thought of as an alternative. As part of the "New Negro" Movement an effort was being made to revise history with a greater understanding of the experience of African Americans. Through this new understanding, a greater sense of identity would be achieved. The black community, as well as the larger American community could more readily understand the experience of African Americans if a more inclusive version of history was promoted.

Traditionally, women have been the "guardians of culture."[50] They have been the individuals who have saved and maintained family, documents, histories, and traditions. Because of this, women seemed well suited to the work of librarians and archivists. These women often, "found, organized, maintained, and publicized these historical sources."[51] Through this practice, they expanded the definition of a historical source. These sources included family relics and mementos, oral histories, and folklore that had

[49] Du Bois, 523; Kirshke, *Art in Crisis*, 179.
[50] Julie Des Jardins, "Black Librarians and the Search for Women's Biography during the New Negro History Movement," *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* (January 2006): 16.
[51] Des Jardins, 15.

been passed down maternally.[52] African American women allowed for the study of peoples who contributed to the greater understanding of the African American experience, including the history of African American women themselves.

Efforts of this new study of history that was stressed during the Harlem Renaissance revealed Black women's history. It was Du Bois's belief that by understanding the past, the construction of a new positive identity would be created more efficiently. He explained women's experience in slavery as different from men's. Female slaves were subject to, "polygamy, polyandry, concubinage, and moral degradation."[53] He gives credit to African American women's endurance and strength when he said, "I most sincerely doubt if any other race of women could have brought its finest up through so devilish a fire."[54] Women did not enjoy the protection of marriage or a right to her children. Custom and religion filled this void, and women were the protectors of these traditions. These women were successful in doing this through the conditions of slavery and racism. Through this study women were found to be the keepers of tradition as well as the primary educator of the bulk of the African American community. Her status and rights were therefore valuable and important.

Important historical figures were a large part of this new movement for history, and women worked to unveil their stories. Figures such as Fredrick Douglas, Sourjourer Truth, and Harriet Tubman were celebrated through art. One of these representations of historical African American women is found in Aaron Douglas's "Harriet Tubman" from 1930 (Figure 22). This mural was made for a women's college in order to celebrate

[52] Ibid, 17.
[53] Du Bois, 515.
[54] Ibid, 516.

African American women's historical contribution. Tubman was an escaped slave who led over three hundred others to freedom through the Underground Railroad system. She was known as the Moses of her people and is shown centered in the composition with her hands above her head breaking the shackles of slavery. Other elements of the composition represent African American's experience from Africa, to slavery, freedom, and the promise of industry. Figures on the right are shown in educational, agricultural, nurturing roles, and one looks past the edge of the composition to the future. In this mural, a woman is given the glory of heroism and is celebrated for her strength and leadership.[55]

History linked women to their African heritage. Images of Africa were often used to celebrate the heritage of the African American people. Africa itself is often symbolized as the mother of its people. Although black artists were trying to escape from the stereotype of their inherent connection to and ability to make "primitive" art, often associated with African imagery, a strong movement to make connections with Africa was underway. Pan-Africanism moved to create a common identity for all those with African heritage. The subjects that depict this connection were often women. Evidence of this is seen in the style of Aaron Douglas's figures. Their faces reference Ivory Coast masks that can be seen in figures one and two.

Egyptian representations were often used as a postcolonial statement. Egyptian traditions and art were in vogue in the 1920s and had been accepted into the western cannon of art for some time. By identifying Egypt as a part of Africa and linking themselves to Africa, people of color were linking themselves to a "black identity whose

[55] Kirschke, *Aaron Douglas*, 116.

origins were in the triumph and civilization of Egypt rather than the barbarism of slavery."[56] This was not a connection to the primitive that the white world so often wished to make, it was a link to the origin of high art. In the "Burden of Black Womanhood" the figure is represented in profile, similar to Egyptian hieroglyphic style (Figure 2). The depiction of the figure's hair also references Egyptian headdress style. Here, women's depiction as Egyptian, linked her with positive past traditions.

Women were encouraged to become educated during the time of the Harlem Renaissance. Professions as educators and librarians were nurturing in nature and therefore considered to be appropriate for women. Despite this sexist assumption, women made wonderful strides in their efforts to create a new and more inclusive history. Through this, African Americans gained a greater understanding of their history and identity. This was especially true of African American women whose historical experience was very different from white women's and black men's. Links to African and Egyptian history also created a sense of pride and unity between all people of African heritage.

[56] Kirschke, *Art in Crisis*, 135.

Beauty and Sexuality: Exotic "Other" or Celebration of Pan-Africanism?

Du Bois commented on the idea of beauty standards and how they were applied to black women. He claimed that black women's beauty did not fit into the commonly held white standards of beauty. Beauty often made a woman, a woman, but could a black woman be a full women by succumbing to white standards of beauty? He claimed that women of color are asked to be efficient, strong, fertile, and muscled for work, not ornamented for consumption. He compared men's worth as being held in his ideas and thoughts, and women's worth being held in her beauty. He asked why thoughts and ideas would be hindered by beauty or the lack of it.[57] Women of color were burdened with the necessity of maintaining a white standard of femininity, although they were largely excluded from the benefits and respect that those standards held.

African American Women's representation in art and illustration of the Harlem Renaissance offers up the issue of colorism, which is discrimination based on the favoring of lighter colored skin. Women of mixed race were often the figures used to represent the whole of the African American female community. As the purpose of the movement was to show positive representations of peoples in order to promote race pride, as well as promote acceptance from the white community, this preference of lighter skinned women would imply that this representation would be the ideal for women to strive to achieve. It would mean that lighter skin was what was wanted and needed for acceptance into greater equality. The standards of feminine beauty were white; to

[57] Du Bois, 524.

assimilated African American women had to adapted to this perception.[58] This can be seen in "A woman lawyer," and "Girl in a white blouse" (Figures 11,10). Here the less assimilated, lower class woman, "Girl in a white blouse," is shown with more African features, including darker skin and kinky hair. The features given to "A woman lawyer" are less pronounced and her hair is bobbed in the popular white fashion. The higher class, educated woman possess "whiter" characteristics, therefore implying that they are more desirable, and that white was the right way to look in order to achieve equality.

Works depicting women of mixed race, by Harlem Renaissance artists, are often titled as such to make obvious the audience's knowledge of their heritage. Aaron Douglas's cover of the 1925 issue of the *Opportunity* illustrates this (Figure 23). The illustration of the women on the cover of this issue was identified by text as "mullato." The woman is pictured with her eyes closed, and her hands crossed across her heart, often the position of a corpse in a casket. This woman was portrayed as passive, to the extreme of having a dead and lifeless expression. She is beautiful in her portrayal, but offered little insight to character, with much more emphasis placed upon her as an object to be consumed by the viewer.[59] Her light skin color associated her with white women, who were presumably inherently passive and docile to white men. This promotion of white skin as desirable also presumed that passivity was desirable and was in conjunction with the patriarchal norm.

An interesting statement is made in "Africa," the cover of the January 1921 issue of *The Crisis* (Figure 24). This image shows a statue of a female figure downtrodden and

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[58] Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman: Visual and Literal Culture in the Harlem Renaissance*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 27.

[59] Orlando, 66.

slouching as if exhausted. Although she is tired, she is also strong in her musculature and her monumental size. She symbolized Africa, and the people of Africa's, ability to overcome. This is a neoclassical sculpture however, and the woman representing Africa ironically possesses strong Caucasian features. Historically it was reinforced that black was ugly; this was especially true when applied to feminine characteristics. Africa here is strong, but characteristics of its people, especially of its women, were not worthy to symbolize it here.

Some representations of mixed race women were made in celebration of their beauty and respectability, but a notion of the primitive "other" remains, such as in Archibald J. Motley, Jr.'s, "The Octoroon Girl" from 1925 (Figure 7). She is shown as nearly white, but with some traces of her African American and what would be thought of as primitive or exotic heritage. Women painted similarly to this are not painted as a member of a group but as a spectacle, something holding mystery, especially through the gaze of a white population. She is objectified, as her black sexuality is white spectacle. [60]

Illustrations in African American intellectual journals were also guilty of "primitivism" in their depictions of African women. In reference to Africa and Africans Du Bois said,

> The dreamless beat of midday stillness at dusk, at dawn, at noon, always. Things move – black shiny bodies perfect bodies, bodies of sleek unearthly poise and beauty. Eyes languish, black eyes – slow yes, lovely and tender eyes in great dark formless faces, life is slow here.[61]

This romanticism can also be seen in Allan Freelon's "A Jungle Nymph" (Figure 25). A young female lays in a position common in the tradition of 19th century nudes. One could make connections to Manet's "Olympia" or Gauguin's Tahitian subjects, which are often

[60] Sherrard-Johnson, 24-35.
[61] Kirschke, *Art in Crisis*, 159.

understood as naked instead of nude, and therefore sexual objects. This woman is placed in a jungle setting and possesses African facial features and natural hair. This romanticism of African women and Africa in general, could play into the stereotype of an over sexualized and wild primitive. By representing African women in this way, separation from heritage is produced. This woman is an African primitive and nothing like a civilized African American woman. She is therefore place into "other" status.

By placing Africans in an "other" status separation between people of African heritage was created. This is opposite of what Pan-Africanism attempted to do. This sexualization of African women, made by African American men, associated them with white male sexualization of all women of color. By sexualizing these women as exotic primitives they assumed that they were uncivilized, and therefore in need of control, presumably a man's control. By exerting dominance over women, black men asserted their assimilation into white patriarchy, which placed men in control of women.

Other exploitive representations of Africa are seen with women as their subjects. The May 1925 cover of *The Crisis*, "A Moorish Maid," features a photograph of an African tribal woman partially dressed (Figure 24). This, and similar anthropologic images were used to gain readership by sexual appeal to the fantasy of a more sexually free and primitive people. [62]

Despite this objectification of African women, images were created to connect traditions of Egypt and Africa to African American people and trends of the 1920s. In Joyce S. Carrington's untitled drawing, in the September 1928 issue of *The Crisis*, connection is made between a modern woman and ancient Egypt (Figure 27). The

[62] Kirschke, *Art in Crisis*, 160.

hairstyle and string of pearls the woman wears are characteristic of a 1920s flapper, the style in vogue at the time. The background of desert, pyramid, and palm tree, places her in an African setting.

Images of the flapper are carefully used to depict African American women. Images of a sexually liberated flapper were being largely produced in popular culture. The flapper, considered promiscuous and troublesome, was exactly the stereotype that the "New Negro Movement" wished to avoid.[63] Imaging of African American women had often included two extremes, the exotic figure, and a "Dutiful, religious, excessively humble character…"[64] Women, particularly young women, often fell into the first extreme. Marita Bonner, an African American writer of the early twentieth century, explained that women are often considered, "A gross collection of uncontrolled desires."[65]

The flapper is often free in her dress and movement, but because of this she is also sexualized. More of her body is shown and the curves of her movement portray a more sexually liberated woman. Gwendolyn Bennett's cover of the July 1926 *Opportunity,* perhaps is a happy medium between the newly liberated woman of the 1920s and over-sexualized exotic stereotype used to depict African American women (Figure 28). Figures in the background reference her African heritage with free open and confident posses. They are partially nude, but their sexuality is diminished by their placement in the background. The modern flapper woman, in the foreground, is also dancing. She is shown with natural hair, also referencing pride in her natural beauty, not that created by

[63] Orlando, 74.
[64]Joyce Flynn, "Introduction," in *Frye Street & Environs: The Collected Works of Marita Bonner*, ed. Joyce Flynn and Joyce Occomy Stricklin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), xiv.
[65] Bonner, 5.

popular white culture. Her gaze is downward, non-confronting, perhaps showing her sustained modesty despite her flapper imagery and activity. [66]

African American women's beauty is also celebrated in Laura Wheeler's "Africa in America," from the June 1924 issue of The Crisis. A black woman is shown, representing all African peoples brought against their will to America (Figure 29). She is also shown in an Armana style of a Nefertiti sculpture. Nefertiti was the wife of an Egyptian pharaoh and often considered an icon female beauty. Here Wheeler is denoting white standards of beauty and making the statement that black is beautiful by associating Nefertiti with African American women.[67]

African American women were continually ridiculed for lack of beauty based on their inability to conform to white standards. Women who were able to succumb to, or attempt to succumb to, this version of beauty were seen as more assimilated and therefore worthy of greater respect. Women associated with more African characteristics were seen as more sexual, as they had been historically. Efforts were made however, to combat this. Work of artists worked to counteract stereotypes, and make the statement, that black was beautiful.

[66] Orlando, 82.
[67] Ibid, 153.

For Further Consideration

The Crisis, *The New Negro,* and *Survey Graphic*, ignored many seemingly important aspects of Harlem Renaissance culture prevalent at the time. An example of this is its lack of any blatant discussion of sexual activity. Efforts were made to reinvigorate African Americans with pride for their community, move away from images of slavery and redemption, and the stereotypes of the hyper-sexed "jezebel" and "black brute" that went with them. Despite this, publishers often creatively stifled artists in order to show a clean, positive image of African Americans. Du Bois specifically was an advocate for art as propaganda and its ability to show African Americans intellectual contributions. Younger artists felt that a broader picture, including the working class, issues of sexuality, and other taboos, needed to be shown. To do this, they started publications under their own leadership. Wallace Thurman was responsible for the publishing of the journals *Fire!!*, in 1926, and *Harlem*, starting in 1928. He called for art to move away from the purpose of propaganda. He, and his contributors wished to move away from conservative leadership and portray the good, as well as the less socially acceptable aspects of African American culture.[68]

An explanation of why imagery of sexuality was stifled could be in the efforts to avoid emphasis on African American sexuality, which was often stressed and demonized in portrayals in popular culture. The lack of mention of any kind of homosexuality in intellectual journals is odd, as many artists and writers were expressing it elsewhere. Scholars have even stated that Locke himself was a homosexual.[69] This exclusion of homosexuality, which was often considered deviant at this time, stresses the emphasis

[68] Carroll, 197.
[69] Ibid, 189.

that the Harlem Renaissance placed on the normality of African American sexuality and the gender roles that traditional heterosexuality imposed. This included the role of a woman as a wife and mother in a nuclear family.

Illustrations and literary works in *Fire!!* covered issues such as prostitution and homosexuality. These works were not making judgments about these kinds of issues or even discussing them as problems that needed solutions. The purpose of these publications was to simply offer an artistic outlet for these kinds of issues to be made evident. Wallace's work depicts women in a different and much more bohemian way than what was seen in other publications. Women in his narratives possess sexual desire. Perhaps this feeds an oversexed image, but his characters are willing and able to express and act on their sexuality of their own free will. The fact that they were given control of their sexuality and were not just sexual objects, offered them a new kind of power, and moved them away from the impulsive stereotype. Wallace also represented himself as a female character in more than one of his narratives. This acceptance to crossing the gender line reflects the more open and accepting atmosphere that the younger more bohemian publications gave to women artists.[70] Further consideration to women's visual representation in these publications would make for interesting scholarship.

[70] Nadell, 200-202.

Conclusion

Despite African American women's unique experience and two fold discrimination, they remained important contributors to the Movement for the "New Negro." Through their work in clubs and organizations they took a nurturing role for social change. Through this work she conformed to socially acceptable roles for women and femininity, but made strides for the New Negro Movement and community. Elite and intellectual women's roles followed the standard of Du Bois's "talented tenth" philosophy of uplifting the lower peoples of society. This was shown in the illustrations and given credit in the writing of the day. Regardless of her conformity to standards of femininity however, irony remained that much of the respect given to women at this time was withheld from women of color.

Regardless of women's inequality to enter professions, they made incredible strides to become economically independent. Women worked in the important professions of teaching and library science. Through her history of nurturing, tradition, and maintaining custom, women were an integral part of writing and contributing to new histories, including that of her own. Many African American women worked outside of the home, a custom not normally thought proper for women of the day. Her need for work was often to supplement her husband's below average wages. Credit is given to women's incredible sacrifice in their efforts in raising and supporting their children, regardless of her multiple hardships.

Stereotypes labeled black women as "a gross collection of desires," but much of her representation in art combats this. Although images were published, even in African American journals, which link her to an over-sexualized primitive image, African

American women were celebrated for their beauty and African heritage. They were celebrated for there abilities to raise and uplift their community from the oppression of racism. This was shown in many of the works discussed above, as well as a work that will conclude, on a positive note, the discussion of women in the Harlem Renaissance.

In "Negro Womanhood" by Roscoe C. Wright the viewer sees a similar representation to Douglas's "Burden of Black Womanhood" (Figure 27). A stylized female figure lifts her hands to the sky, as if in celebration. She is shown with strength and power, as she is seen towering over the background objects, which include the pyramids and cabins of her past. She breaks free from the chains of slavery on the right side of the composition, and rejoices, as a rainbow and orphic shapes decorate the sky. This piece shows the special ability of the women of the Harlem Renaissance Movement to uplift herself and her community for the fight and hope of greater equality.[71]

[71] Kirschke, *Art in Crisis*, 144.

Appendix of Figures

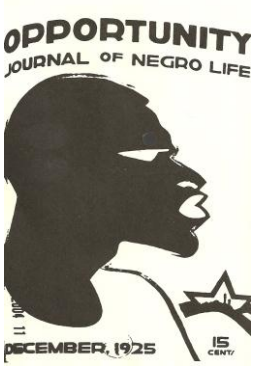

Figure 1: Aaron Douglas, Cover for the June 1926, *The Opportunity, Journal of Negro-Life.* Reprinted in *New Voices on the Harlem Renaissance: Essays on Race, Gender, and Literary Discourse*, ed. Australia Tarver and Paula C. Barnes, 60. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 2006. Photo Courtesy of the National Urban League.

Figure 2: Douglas, Aaron. "The Burden of Black Womanhood." In *The Crisis*, cover. September 1927. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*, by Amy Helene Kirschke, 144. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

Figure 3: Aaron Douglas, "Aspects of Negro Life: Panel 4: Song of Towers," 1934, oil on canvas, 274.3cm x 274.3cm. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. ARTstor Slide Gallery.

Figure 4: "You can plainly see how miserable I am," 1920s, postcard, http://www.authentichistory.com/diversity/african/chickenwatermelon/1920sc_Postcard-Watermelon_01.html.

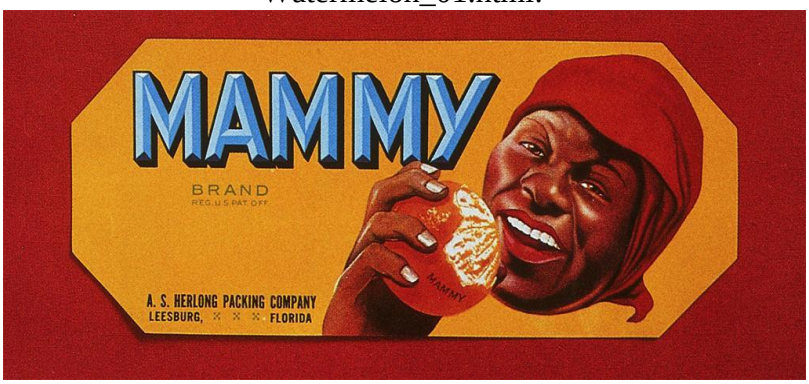

Figure 5: "Advertising label for Mammy brand fruit," ArtStor Slide Gallery.

Figure 6: Museum of Racist Memorabilia, "Sassy Mammy," Ferris State University, http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/sapphire/.

Figure 7: Archibald J. Motley Jr., "The Octoroon Girl," 1925. Chicago History Museum and Valerie Gerrad Browne. Reprinted in *Portraits of the New Negro Woman: Visual and Literal Culture in the Harlem Renaissance*, by Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, 23. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

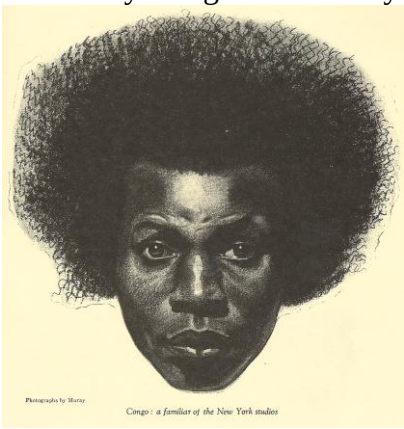

Figure 8: Winold Reiss, "Harlem Types: Congo," 1925. In *Survey Graphic: Harlem Mecca of the New Negro,* 651. Reprint, Maryland: Black Classic Press, 1980.

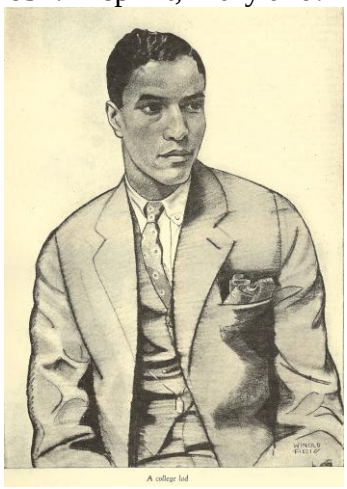

Figure 9: Winold Reiss, "Harlem Types: A College Lad," 1925. In *Survey Graphic: Harlem Mecca of the New Negro,* 654. 1925. Reprint, Maryland: Black Classic Press, 1980.

Figure 10: Winold Reiss, "Harlem Types: Girl in a white blouse." In *Survey Graphic: Harlem Mecca of the New Negro,* 653. 1925. Reprint, Maryland: Black Classic Press, 1980.

Figure 11: Winold Reiss, "Harlem Types: A woman lawyer." In *Survey Graphic: Harlem Mecca of the New Negro,* 653. 1925. Reprint, Maryland: Black Classic Press, 1980.

Figure 12: "Votes for Women," August 1915. In *The Crisis,* cover. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory,* by Amy Helene Kirschke, 213. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

Figure 13: Winold Reiss, "Four Portraits of Negro Women: Woman from the Virgin Islands." In *Survey Graphic: Harlem Mecca of the New Negro*, 684. 1925. Reprint, Maryland: Black Classic Press, 1980.

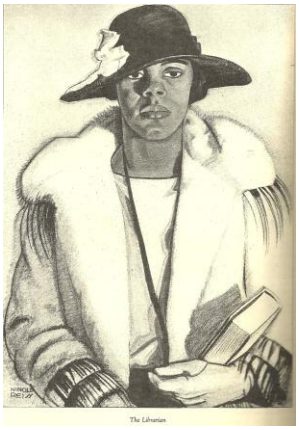

Figure 14: Winold Reiss, "Four Portraits of Negro Women: The Librarian." In *Survey Graphic: Harlem Mecca of the New Negro*, 685. 1925. Reprint, Maryland: Black Classic Press, 1980.

Figure 15: Winold Reiss, "Four Portraits of Negro Women: Two Public School Teachers." In *Survey Graphic: Harlem Mecca of the New Negro*, 686. 1925. Reprint, Maryland: Black Classic Press, 1980.

Figure 16: Winold Reiss, "Four Portraits of Negro Women: Elise Johnson McDougald." In *Survey Graphic: Harlem Mecca of the New Negro*, 687. 1925. Reprint, Maryland: Black Classic Press, 1980.

Figure 17: John Henry Adams, "Women to the Rescue!" In *The Crisis*, 43. May 1916. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*, by Amy Helene Kirschke, 216. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2007.

Figure 18: Zell Ingram, "A Flight into Egypt." In *The Crisis*, cover. March 1933. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory,* by Amy Helene Kirschke, 155. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

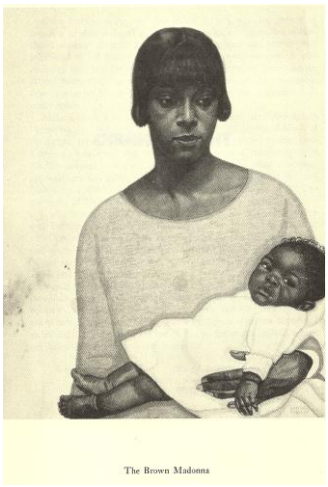

Figure 19: Winold Reiss, "The Brown Madonna." In *The New Negro: an Interpretation*, edited by Alain Locke, frontispiece. 1925. Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1968.

Figure 20: "Untitled drawing of two graduates." In *The Crisis*, cover. July 1912. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*, by Amy Helene Kirschke, 180. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2007.

Figure 21: Lorenzon Harris, "The New Education in the South…." In *The Crisis*, 247. September 1913. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*, by Amy Helene Kirschke, 180. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2007.

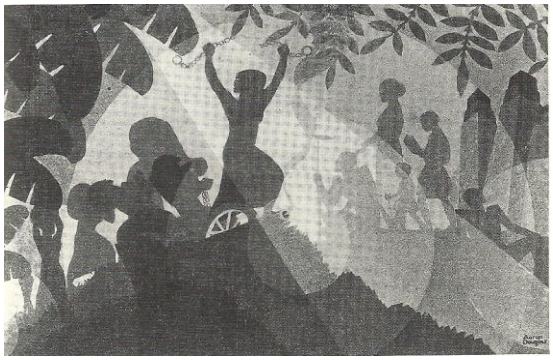

Figure 22: Aaron Douglas, "Harriet Tubman," 1930. Reprinted in *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance*, by Amy Helene Kirschke, fig. 74. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995. Photo Courtesy of Bennett College.

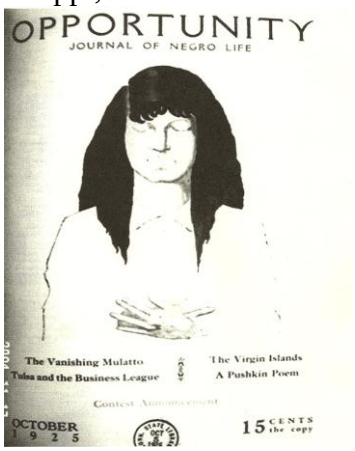

Figure 23: Aaron Douglas, Cover of October 1925, *The Opportunity, Journal of Negro-Life.* Reprinted in *New Voices on the Harlem Renaissance: Essays on Race, Gender, and Literary Discourse,* ed. Australia Tarver and Paula C. Barnes, 69. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 2006. Photo Courtesy of the National Urban League.

Figure 24: "Africa" from New York Customs House. In *The Crisis*, cover. January 1921. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*, by Amy Helen Kirschke, 140. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

Figure 25: Alan Freelon, "A Jungle Nymph." In *The Crisis*, cover. June 1928. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*, by Amy Helene Kirschke, 162. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2007.

Figure 26: "A Moorish Maid." In *The Crisis*, cover. May 1925. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*, by Amy Helene Kirschke, 162. Bloomington: Indiana University, 2007.

Figure 27: Joyce S. Carrington, "Untitled drawing of a modern African woman." In *The Crisis*, cover. September 1928. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory*, by Amy Helene Kirschke, 145. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

Figure 28: Gwendolyn Bennett, Cover of July 1926, *The Opportunity, Journal of Negro-Life*. Reprinted in *New Voices on the Harlem Renaissance: Essays on Race, Gender, and Literary Discourse*, ed. Australia Tarver and Paula C. Barnes, 85. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press 2006. Photo Courtesy of the National Urban League.

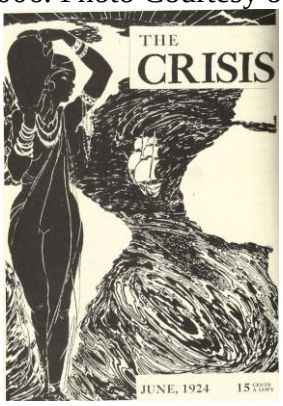

Figure 29: Laura Wheeler, "African in America." In *The Crisis*, cover. June 1924. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory,* by Amy Helene Kirschke, 152. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

Figure 30: Wright, Roscoe C, "Negro Womanhood." In *The Crisis*, cover. January 1928. Reprinted in *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory,* by Amy Helene Kirschke, 145. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

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Please see "Appendix of Figures" for visual sources.

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"On Being Young – a Woman – and Colored" is an autobiographical essay, first published in a 1925 issue of The Crisis. Bonner gives insight to the experience of young African American women during the time of the Harlem Renaissance. Her experience is different from white women's but also different from that of black men. She must experience all the discrimination of a black man but must react to it in a way suited for a lady, this being a form of discrimination in itself. She must experience her discrimination in silence, and her counteraction against it must fit into the roles of womanhood.

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"The Damnation of Women" is an essay, originally published in *Darkwater*, in 1916. It was a collection of previously published essays by W.E.B Du Bois. He says black women's experience is unique and that black motherhood and virginity should not be demonized. Black women have contributed much to the culture of the African American community. They have achieves much economic independence and should not be subjected to the limiting standards of Victorian womanhood, but also should be given the respect that white women enjoy.

Diggs, Irene. "Du Bois and Children." *Phylon* 37 (4th Quarter 1976): 370-399.

Diggs has brought together many of Du Bois's writing on children and their issues. Some of these excerpts reference women and girls.

Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro: an Interpretation*. 1925. Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1968.

The success of the *Survey Graphic* issue on African Americans led to the publication of The New Negro. This publication included the content of the *Survey Graphic* issue but also added more. This extended work's goal was more to create a unifying African American identity, than it to create interracial relations. It wished to embrace the differences in the community, and allowed for suggestions of further study, with the inclusion of an extensive bibliography. Despite its efforts to portray a bigger picture, it still enforced the ideas of elitism and sexism that the previous work had

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"The Task of Negro Womanhood" is an essay included in the publication of the *Survey Graphic* and The New Negro. It was written by, Elise Johnson McDougald, who was a

well-accomplished woman with expertise in teaching, and writing. McDougald explained the effects of African American women's discrimination on her economic situation, standard of beauty, and experience in motherhood.

Survey Graphic: Harlem Mecca of the New Negro. 1925. Reprint, Maryland: Black Classic Press, 1980.
The *Survey Graphic* was a magazine devoted to the study of groups of people. Previous issues had been about the Irish, Mexican, and Russian communities, which had experienced similar "renaissances" or social movements for change. The responsibility of editorship was placed in the hands of African Americans, under the leadership of Alain Locke, a Harvard educated African American intellectual, often cited as being the father of the New Negro Movement.

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Often considered the first book to thoroughly cover the Harlem Renaissance, this source covers the movement and it's effect on the larger American culture. The book gives a large overview of the movements contributors and their philosophies regarding the ideals of the large movement. Art and literature is used as sources. All though important female contributions are mentions the larger female experience is generally lacking in this book and the concept of the "New Negro" is generally male.

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Jardins, Julie Des. "Black Librarians and the Search for Women's Biography during the New Negro History Movement." *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* (January 2006): 15-18.
An article praising the efforts of African American women in there work in libraries and archives. It credits these women with their great contribution to the study of African American history.

Kirschke, Amy Helene. *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race, and the Harlem Renaissance*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995.
This work is a biography of one of the most important artists of the Harlem Renaissance. His work in illustration is largely discussed.

Kirschke, Amy Helene. *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.
Kirschke offers insight to Du Bois and the creation of *The Crisis* and its role in the Harlem Renaisance. In her chapter, "Art Political Commentary, and Forging a Common Identity." Kirschke argues that Du Bois used imagery of racism and prejudice in *The Crisis* in order to denounce them. He used imagery of education, labor, women, the family, and children to promote the "New Negro" identity in these groups

Kirschke, Amy Helene. "The Burden of Black Womanhood: Aaron Douglas and the 'Apogee of Beauty'." *American Studies Journal* 49, ½ (2008): 97-105.
Kirschke argues that Douglas's portrayal of women is very positive and denounces commonly held notions of beauty. The work celebrates the experience of the African American woman and documents their experience in discrimination as two fold, one as being female and the other as being black. Again this source lends its self to positive participation of women.

Kirschke, Amy Helene. "The Depression Murals of Aaron Douglas: Radical Politics and African American Art." *The International Review of African American Art* 12, 4 (1995): 18-105.
An article discussing Aaron Douglas's work during the depression that mostly included murals commissioned for academic institutions.

Nadell, Martha Jane. *Enter the New Negroes: Images of Race in American Culture.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004.
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This is a discussion of the contributions of woman literary artists during the Harlem Renaissance. This book explains the works, lives and interactions, primarily of Jessie Redmon Fauset, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston. The discussion of Nella Larsen goes into detail with the themes of the dichotomous and often confusing identity that women of mixed race possessed at this time.